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General debate on national experience in population matters: realizing the future we want — integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda

Statement submitted by Federation for Women and Family Planning, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Realizing the future we want: integrating sexual and reproductive health and rights into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda

Federation for Women and Family Planning on behalf of ASTRA and ASTRA Youth Networks welcomes the priority theme of forty-eighth session of the Commission on Population and Development: "Realizing the future we want: integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda". As the international community, we stand at the critical point of building upon the significance of the 20th anniversary of ICPD Programme of Action and evolving towards the post-2015 development framework, which will set the foundations for future population advancement. Thus it is high time we address the vitality of inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and rights into the future agenda and advancement of sustainable development through these.

The realization of human rights lies at the core of achieving sustainable development. This has been recognized, inter alia, in the Rio+20 outcome document and the set of sustainable development goals prepared by the Open Working Group, which provides one of the mandates for post-2015 framework and places health, education and equality at the core of economic and social growth. Full realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights is crucial to achieve progress. To facilitate education and employment attainment and enable meaningful and productive contribution to society, it is necessary to provide universal access to affordable, acceptable, youth-friendly, high-quality reproductive and sexual health services; implement comprehensive sexuality education programmes through in-and out-of-school surroundings, counteract discrimination and violence against all, especially marginalized groups. Although the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights to sustainable development is undisputable, challenges with their recognition and realization are encountered.

Central and Eastern Europe serves as an example of remaining challenges concerning population issues, particularly sexual and reproductive health and rights. In the last decades the countries of the region have struggled with the burden of transformation, resulting in significant economic and social disparities and therefore hindering human rights' advancement. Currently the region experiences a rise of fundamentalism, including religious, and well-organized and funded opposition aiming to block access of youth and women to basic reproductive and sexual health services and information. The increase of radicalisms along with lack of political will pose a serious threat to the progressive work of civil society. Taking into consideration all these factors and recent developments, it is evident that women's and girls' human rights, especially sexual and reproductive rights, are currently under crisis in Central and Eastern Europe.

Both the Rio+20 outcome document entitled "The future we want" and the sustainable development goals proposal indicate that to "ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education"[1] is of great importance in the future development

[1] Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations General Assembly, August 2014.

agenda. The policies in the region to ensure this access, including modern contraception, safe abortion, prevention of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS are not sufficient and do not address the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Adolescents are denied the possibility to make responsible and informed choices, facing economic and legal limitations in access to contraception, such as age restrictions and necessity of parental and/or spousal consent. Girls and women across the region encounter difficulties with accessing abortion services and as a consequence resort to clandestine and unsafe abortions threatening their health and lives. The region also struggles with the growing epidemic of HIV/AIDS as the rates have tripled in the last decade and are still increasing, being the highest among adolescents and women.[2] The prevalence of abortion and unintended adolescent pregnancies in Central and Eastern Europe is three times higher than in the West.[3]

Comprehensive sexuality education remains a compelling issue for young people and adolescents as it is not implemented across the region. The existing school curricula are inadequate and often limited to information on biology and risk prevention. Limiting access to comprehensive information on sexual and reproductive health combined with obstacles in accessing healthcare services hinder adolescents' and young people's safe and healthy transition into adulthood. They are therefore vulnerable to health damage, coercion and intersectional discrimination. Young girls face particular risks of stigma and social exclusion as unintended pregnancies may lead to school dropout and block the way to complete education and entering the labour market. Furthermore, the realization of human potential, especially of women and girls is threatened by persistent discrimination and violence, including sexual violence, on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity and other factors, which happens both in private and public spheres.

Throughout the process of creating the post-2015 development framework there has been growing understanding that the new agenda will not be successfully implemented without ensuring rights of young people and women. The synthesis report of the Secretary General on the post-2015 agenda "The Road to Dignity by 2030" recognizes that the realization of reproductive health and rights and ensuring gender equality and non-discriminatory environment is vital to enhancing and maintaining sustainable development.[4] It must be recognized that women, who represent half of world's population today, and 1.8. billion young people are struggling with the consequences of their sexual and reproductive rights violations. To overcome these challenges, the post-2015 development framework must address properly the needs and rights of youth and women and recognize that the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights is essential to achieve the future we want.

ASTRA and ASTRA Youth recommend the following actions to be undertaken by the governments in order to enhance young people's and women's rights:

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[2] HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, WHO Regional Office for Europe, November 2014.

[3] Population trends and Policies in the UNECE region. Outcomes, Policies and Possibilities, UNFPA, July 2013.

[4] The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet. Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General On the Post-2015 Agenda, December 2014.

1. Ensure that the post-2015 development agenda includes the goals regarding realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including providing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and information.

2. Realize the highest attainable standard of sexual and reproductive health, particularly for young people and women. This can be accomplished by eliminating all economic and legal barriers in access to safe, affordable, acceptable, modern contraception, providing access to safe and legal abortion services and ensuring comprehensive sexually transmitted infections and HIV counselling and treatment. These services must meet the needs of all young people and women, especially those marginalized on the basis of ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and other factors.

3. Secure adolescents' right to information on their sexual and reproductive health through implementation of comprehensive sexuality education in and out of school surroundings. The programmes which are to provide young people with knowledge and skills crucial for their healthy and safe development need to be mandatory, non-discriminatory, non-judgmental, evidence-based and provided accordingly with evolving youth capacities.

4. Monitor and evaluate the existing policies regarding sexual and reproductive health and ensure they are free of barriers pertaining access of adolescents and women to health care services and discrimination, especially of those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, with disabilities and ethnic minorities.